RULES GOVERNING THE CRITICISM OF HADITH

Dr Mahmoud At-Tahhaan

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

*Bismi Allahi A**l**rrahmani A**l**rraheemi*

In the name of Allah, the most Beneficent, the most Merciful

Rules Governing the Criticism of Hadeeth

Prologue

Introduction

A hadith (pl. ahadith) is composed of two parts: the matn (text) and the isnad (chain of reporters). A text may seem to be logical and reasonable but it needs an authentic isnad with reliable reporters to be acceptable; 'Abdullah b. al-Mubarak (d. 181 AH) is reported to have said,

"The isnad is part of the religion: had it not been for the isnad, whoever wished to would have said whatever he liked."

During the lifetime of the Prophet (SAS) and after his death, his Companions (Sahabah) used to refer to him when quoting his sayings. The Successors (Tabi'un) followed suit; some of them used to quote the Prophet (SAS) through the Companions while others would omit the intermediate authority - such a hadith was known as mursal (loose). It was found that the missing link between the Successor and the Prophet (SAS) might be one person, i.e. a Companion, or two persons, the extra person being an older Successor who heard the hadith from the Companion. This is an example of how the need for the verification of each isnad arose. Malik (d. 179) said,

"The first one to utilise the isnad was Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri" (d. 124 AH).

Mustalah al-Hadith and Rijal

As time passed, more reporters were involved in each isnad, and so the situation demanded strict discipline in the acceptance of ahadith; the rules regulating this discipline are known as Mustalah al-Hadith (the Science of Hadith).

Mustalah books speak of a number of classes of hadith in accordance with their status. The following classifications can be made, each of which is explained later:

1. According to the reference to a particular authority, e.g. the Prophet (SAS), a Companion, or a Successor; such ahadith are called marfu' (elevated), mauquf (delayed) and maqtu' (severed) respectively .

2. According to the nature of the chain of reporters, i.e. whether interrupted or uninterrupted, e.g. musnad (supported), muttasil (continuous), munqati" (broken), mu'allaq (suspended), mu'dal (perplexing) and mursal (loose).

3. According to the number of reporters involved in each isnad, e.g. mutawatir (consecutive) and ahad (isolated), the latter being divided into gharib (rare), 'aziz (scarce), and mash-hur (widespread) .

4. According to the way in which a saying has been reported such as using the words 'an (- "on the authority of"), haddathana (- "he narrated to us"), akhbarana (- "he informed us") or sami'tu (- "I

heard"). In this category falls the discussion about mudallas (concealed) and musalsal (connected) ahadith.

5. According to the nature of the matn and isnad, e.g. an addition by a reliable reporter, known as ziyadah thiqa, or opposition by a lesser authority to a more reliable one, known asshadh (aloof). In some cases a text containing a vulgar expression, unreasonable remark or an apparently erroneous statement is rejected by the traditionists outright without consideration of the isnad. Such a hadith is known as munkar (denounced). If an expression or statement is proved to be an addition by a reporter to the text, it is declared as mudraj (added).

6. According to a hidden defect found in the isnad or text of a hadith. Although it could be included in some of the previous categories, hadith mu'allal (defective hadith) is worthy to be explained separately. The defect can be caused in many ways; e.g. two types of hadith mu'allal are known as maqlub (overturned) and mudtarib (shaky).

7. According to the reliability and memory of the reporters; the final verdict on a hadith depends mainly on this classification: verdicts such as sahih (sound), hasan (good), da'if (weak) and maudu' (fabricated) rest mainly upon the nature of the reporters in the isnad.

Musatalah al-hadith is strongly associated with Rijal al-hadith (the study of the reporters of hadith). In scrutinising the reporters of a hadith, authenticating or disparaging remarks made by recognised experts, whether among the Successors or those after them, were found to be of great help. The earliest remarks cited in the books of Rijal go back to a host of Successors and those after during the first three centuries of Islam. A list of such names is provided by the author in his thesis, Criticism of Hadith among Muslims with reference to Sunan lbn Maja, at the end of chapters IV, V and VI. Among the earliest available works in this field are Tarikh of Ibn Ma'in (d. 233), Tabaqat of Khalifa b. Khayyat (d. 240), Tarikh of Bukhari (d. 256), Kitab al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil of Ibn Abi Hatim (d. 327) and Tabaqat of Muhammad b. Sa'd al-Zuhri (d. 320).

A number of traditionists made efforts specifically for the gathering of information about the reporters of the five famous collections of hadith: those of Bukhari (d. 256), Muslim (d. 261), Abu Dawud (d. 275), Tirmidhi (d. 279) and Nasa'i (d. 303), giving authenticating and disparaging remarks in detail. The first major such work to include also the reporters of Ibn Maja (d. 273) is the ten-volume collection of al-Hafiz 'Abd al-Ghani al-Maqdisi (d. 600), known as Al-Kamal fi Asma' al-Rijal. Later, Jamal al-Din 'Abd al-Hajjaj Yusuf b. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Mizzi (d. 742) prepared an edited and abridged version of this work, but made a number of additions and punctuation of the names by names, places and countries of origin of the reporters. He named it Tahdhib al-Kamal fi Asma' al-Rijal and produced it in twelve volumes. Further, one of al-Mizzi's gifted pupils, Shams al-Din Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad b. Ahmad b. 'Uthman b. Qa'imaz al-Dhahabi (d. 748), summarised his shaikh's work and produced two abridgements: a longer one called Tadhhib al-Tahdhib and a shorter one called Al-Kashif fi Asma' Rijal al-Kutub al-Sitta.

A similar effort with the work of Mizzi was made by Ibn Hajar (d. 852), who prepared a lengthy but abridged version, with about one-third of the original omitted, entitled Tahdhib al-Tahdhib in twelve shorter volumes. Later, he abridged this further to a relatively humble two-volume work called Taqrib al-Tahdhib.

The work of Dhahabi was not left unedited; Khazraji (Saif al-Din Ahmad b. 'Abdullah, d. after 923) summarised it and also made valuable additions, producing his Khulasa.

A number of similar works deal with either trustworthy authorities, e.g. Kitab al-Thiqat by 'Ijli (d. 261) and Tadhkira al-Huffaz by Dhahabi, or with disparaged authorities, e.g. Kitab al-Du'afa' wa al-Matrukin by Nasa'i and Kitab al-Majruhin by Muhammad b. Hibban al-Busti (d. 354).

Two more works in this field, which include a large number of reporters, both authenticated and disparaged, are Mizan al-I'tidal of Dhahabi and Lisan al-Mizan of Ibn Hajar.

The Classification of Hadeeth - According to the reference to a particular authority

The following principal types of hadith are important:

Marfu':

A hadith referred back to the Prophet, e.g. a reporter (whether a Companion, Successor or other) says, "The Messenger of Allah said ..."

Mauquf:

A hadith referred back to a Companion, e.g. "Ibn 'Abbas said ...", without being attributed to the Prophet.

Maqtu':

A hadith referred back to a Successor, e.g. "Al-Hasan al-Basri said ..."

The authenticity of each of these three types of hadith depends on other factors such as the reliability of its reporters, the nature of linkage among them, etc. However, the above classification is extremely useful since through it the sayings of the Prophet can be distinguished at once from those of Companions or Successors; this is especially helpful in debate in matters of fiqh.

Imam Malik's al-Muwatta', one of the early collections of hadith, contains a relatively even ratio of these types of hadith, as well as mursal ahadith (which are discussed below). According to Abu Bakr al-Abhari (d. 375), al-Muwatta' contains the following:

600 marfu' ahadith, 613 mauquf ahadith, 285 maqtu' ahadith, and 228 mursal ahadith; a total of 1726 ahadith.

Among other collections, relatively more mauquf and maqtu' ahadith are found in al-Musannaf of Ibn Abi Shaiba (d. 235), al-Musannaf of 'Abd al-Razzaq (d. 211) and the Tafsirs of Ibn Jarir (d. 310), Ibn Abi Hatim (d. 327) and Ibn al-Mundhir (d. 319).

The Classification of Hadeeth - According to the link found among the reporters

The following categories fall under this heading:

Musnad

Al-Hakim defines it as follows:

"A hadith which a traditionist reports from his shaikh from whom he is known to have heard (ahadith) at a time of life suitable for learning, and similarly in turn for each shaikh, until the isnad reaches a well-known Companion who turn reports from the Prophet."

By this definition, an ordinary muttasil hadith (i.e. one with an uninterrupted isnad) is excluded if it goes back only to a Companion or Successor, as is amarfu' hadith which has an interrupted isnad.

Al-Hakim gave the following example of a musnad hadith:

We reported from Abu 'Amr 'Uthman b. Ahmad al-Sammak al-Baghdadi === Al-Hasan b. Mukarram === 'Uthman b. 'Amr === Yunus --- al-Zuhri --- 'Abdullah b. Ka'b b. Malik --- his father, who asked Ibn Abi Hadrad for payment of a debt he owed to him, in the mosque. During the argument, their voices were raised until heard by the Messenger of Allah who eventually lifted the curtain of his apartment and said, "O Ka'b! Write off a part of your debt." He meant remission of half of it. So he agreed and the man paid him.

Al-Hakim then remarks,

"Now, my hearing from Ibn al-Simak is well-known, as is his from Ibn Mukarram. Al-Hasan's link with 'Uthman b. 'Amr and the latter's with Yunus b. Zaid are known as well. Yunus is always remembered with al-Zuhri, and the latter with the sons of Ka'b b. Malik, whose link to their father and his companionship of the Prophet are well-established."

The term musnad is applied also to those collections of ahadith which give the ahadith of each Companion separately. Among the early compilers of such a Musnad were Yahya b. 'Abd al-Hamid al-Himmani (d. 228) at Kufa and Musaddad b. Musarhad (d. 228) at Basra. The largest existing collection of ahadith of Companions arranged in this manner is that of Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 241), which contains around thirty thousand ahadith. Another larger work is attributed to the famous Andalusian traditionist Baqi b. Makhlad al-Qurtubi (d. 276), but unfortunately it is now untraceable.

Mursal, Munqati', Mu'dal, and Mu'allaq ahadith

If the link between the Successor and the Prophet is missing, the hadith is mursal. In other words, when a Successor says, "The Prophet said ...".

However, if a link anywhere before the Successor (i.e. closer to the traditionist recording the hadith) is missing, the hadith is munqati'. This applies even if there is an apparent link, e.g. a reporter says, "A shaikh or a man reported to me ..." without naming this authority, or when an isnad is apparently muttasil (uninterrupted) but in reality a reporter is found not to have heard from his shaikh.

If the number of missing reporters in the isnad exceeds one, the isnad is mu'dal. If the reporter omits the whole isnad and quotes the Prophet directly (i.e. the link is missing at the beginning, unlike the case with a mursal isnad), the hadith is called mu'allaq (hanging); sometimes it is known as balaghat. For example, Malik says, "It reached me that the Messenger of Allah said ..."

Authenticity of the Mursal Hadith

There has been a great deal of discussion regarding the authenticity of the Mursal Hadith, since it is quite probable that a Successor might have omitted two names, those of an elder Successor and a Companion, rather than just one name, that of a Companion.

If the Successor is known to have omitted the name of a Companion only, then the hadith is held to be authentic, for a Successor can only report from the Prophet through a Companion; the omission of the name of the Companion does not affect the authenticity of the isnad since all Companions are held to be trustworthy and reliable, both by Qur'anic injunctions and sayings of the Prophet.

However, opinions vary in the case where the Successor might have omitted the names of two authorities:

(i) The Marasil of elder Successors such as Sa'id b. al-Musayyab and 'Ata' b. Abi Rabah are acceptable because all their Marasil, after investigation, are found to come through the Companions only. However, the Marasil of younger Successors are only acceptable if the names of their immedeiate authorities are known through different sources; if not, they are rejected outright.

(ii) The Marasil of Successors and those who report from them are acceptable without any investigation at all. This opinion is strongly supported by the Kufi school of traditionists.

To be precise in this issue, let us investigate in detail the various opinions regarding the Mursal Hadith:

1) Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d. 463) says that the opinion held by Imam Malik and all jurists of their school is that the Mursal of a trustworthy person is valid as proof and as justification for a practice, just like a musnad hadith.

To some jurists, such as the Malikiyya, the Mursal is better than the Musnad. Their reasoning is as follows:

"the one who reports a musnad hadith leaves you with the names of the reporters for further investigation and scrutiny, while the one who narrates by way of Irsal, being a knowledgeable and trustworthy person himself, has already done so and the hadith is sound. In fact, he saves you from further research."

2) Abu Hanifa (d. 150) holds the same opinion as Malik; he accepts the Mursal Hadith whether or not it is supported by another hadith.

3) Al-Shafi'i (d. 204) has discussed this issue in detail in his al-Risala; he requires the following conditions to be met before accepting a mursal hadith:

(i) In the narrative, he requires that one of the following conditions be met:

- that it be reported also as musnad through another isnad;
- that its contents be reported as mursal through another reliable source with a different isnad;
- that the meaning be supported by the sayings of some Companions; or
- that most scholars hold the same opinion as conveyed by the mursal hadith.

(ii) Regarding the narrator, he requires that one of the following conditions be met:

- he be an elder Successor;
- if he names the missing person in the isnad, he does not usually name an unknown person or someone not suitable for reporting from acceptably; or
- he does not contradict a reliable person when he happens to share with him in a narration.

On the basis of these arguments, al-Shafi'i accepts the Irsal of Sa'id b. al-Musayyab, one of the elder Successors. For example, al-Shafi'i considers the issue of selling meat in exchange for a living animal. He says that Malik told him, reporting from Zaid b. Aslam, who reported from Ibn al-Musayyab that the Messenger of Allah forbade the selling of meat in exchange for an animal. He then says, "This is our opinion, for the Irsal of Ibn al-Musayyib is sound."

4) Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 241), according to Ibn Qayyim, accepts mursal and da'if ahadith if nothing opposing them is found in a particular issue, preferring them to analogy. He classifies ahadith into sahih and da'if only rather into sahih, hasan and da'if, the preference of most later traditionists. Consequently, a da'if hadith may stand close to sahih in the opinion of Ahmad because of the grading of the Mursal Hadith in fourth position, unlike Malik who regards mursal as equal to musnad.

5) Ibn Hazm (d. 456) rejects the Mursal Hadith outright; he says that the Mursal is unacceptable, whether it comes through Sa'id b. al-Musayyib or al-Hasan al-Basri. To him, even the Mursal of a Companion who was not well-known among the Companions is unacceptable.

6) Abu Dawud (d . 275) accepts the Mursal with two conditions:

a) that no musnad hadith is found regarding that issue; and

b) that if a musnad hadith is found, it is not contradicted by the mursal hadith.

7) Ibn Abi Hatim (d. 327) does not give a specific opinion about the Mursal Hadith. However, he did collect an anthology of 469 reporters ofhadith, including four female reporters, whose narratives were subjected to criticism due to Irsal. This collection is known as Kitab al-Marasil.

8) Al-Hakim (d. 405) is extremely reluctant to accept the Mursal except in the case of elder Successors. He holds, on the basis of the Qur'an, that knowledge is based on what is heard and not on what is reported. In this regard, he quotes Yazid b. Harun who asked Hammad b. Laith:

"O Abu Isma'il! Did Allah mention the people of Hadith in the Qur'an?" He replied, "Yes! Did you not hear the saying of Allah,

If a party from every expedition remained behind, they could devote themselves to studies in religion and admonish the people when they return to them, that thus they (may learn) to guard themselves (against evil)' (Q., 9:l22).

This concerns those who set off to seek knowledge, and then return to those who remained behind in order to teach them."

Al-Hakim then remarks:

"This verse shows that the acceptable knowledge is the one which is being heard, not just received by way of Irsal."

9) Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (d. 462) strongly supports the view of those who reject the Mursal except if it comes through elder Successors. He concludes, after giving a perusal of different opinions about this issue:

"What we select out of these sayings is that the Mursal is not to be practised nor is it acceptable as proof. We say that Irsal leads to one reporter being ambiguous; if he is ambiguous, to ascertain his reliability is impossible. We have already explained that a narration is only acceptable if it comes through a reporter known for reliability. Hence, the Mursal should not be accepted at all."

Al-Khatib gives the following example, showing that a narrative which has been reported through both musnad and mursal isnads is acceptable, not because of the reliability of those who narrated it by way of Irsal but because of an uninterrupted isnad, even through less reliable reporters:

The text of the hadith is: "No marriage is valid except by the consent of the guardian"; al-Khatib gives two isnads going back to Shu'ba and Sufyan al-Thauri; the remainder of each isnad is: Sufyan al-Thauri and Shu'ba --- Abu Ishaq --- Abu Barda --- the Prophet.

This isnad is mursal because Abu Burda, a Successor, narrates directly from the Prophet. However, al-Khatib gives three isnads going back to Yunus b. Abi Ishaq, Isra'il b. Yunus and Qais b. al-Rabi'; the remainder of the first isnad is: Yunus b. Abi Ishaq --- Abu Ishaq --- Abu Burda --- Abu Musa --- the Prophet. The other two reporters narrate similarly, including the name of Abu Musa, the Companion from whom Abu Burda has reported.

Al-Khatib further proves that both al-Thauri and Shu' ba heard this hadith from Abu Ishaq in one

sitting while the other three reporters listened to him in different sittings. Hence this addition of Abu Musa in the isnad is quite acceptable.

10) Ibn al-Salah (d. 643) agrees with al-Shafi'i in rejecting the Mursal Hadith unless it is proved to have come through a musnad route.

11) Ibn Taimiyya (d. 728) classifies Mursal into three categories. He says,

"There are some acceptable, others unacceptable, and some which require further investigation: if it is known that the reporter does so (i.e. narrates byIrsal) from reliable authorities, then his report will be accepted; if he does so from both classes of authorities, i.e. reliable and unreliable, we shall cease to accept his narration if it is proved that sometimes he reports from unknown authorities as well. All such mursal ahadith which go against the reports made by reliable authorities will be rejected completely."

12) Al-Dhahabi (d. 748) regards the Mursal of younger Successors such as al-Hasan al-Basri, al-Zuhri, Qatada and Humaid al-Tawil as the weakest type of Mursal.

Later scholars such as Ibn Kathir (d. 744), al-'Iraqi (d. 806),Ibn Hajar (d. 852), al-Suyuti (d. 910), Muhammad b. Ibrahim al-Wazir (d. 840), Tahir al-Jaza'iri (d. 1338) and Jamal al-Din al-Qasmi (d. 1332) have given exhaustive discussions about this issue, but none of them holds an opinion different to those mentioned above.

The Classification of Hadeeth - Mutawatir and Ahad ahadith

Depending on the number of the reporters of the hadith, it can be classified into the general categories of mutawatir or ahad hadith.

A mutawatir hadith is one which is reported by such a large number of people that they cannot be expected to agree upon a lie, all of them together.

Al-Ghazali (d. 505) stipulates that a mutawatir narration be known by the great number of its reporters equally in the beginning, in the middle and at the end. He is correct in this stipulation because some narrations, although known as mutawatir among some people, whether Muslims or non-Muslims, have no tawatur in the beginning .

Examples of mutawatir practices are the five daily prayers, fasting, zakat, the Hajj and recitation of the Qur'an. Among the verbal mutawatir ahadith, the following has been reported by more than sixty-two Companions and has been widely known among the Muslims throughout the ages:

"Whoever lies about me intentionally, let him reserve his seat in the Fire."

Ahadith related to the description of the Haud Kauthar (the Basin of Abundance) in the Hereafter, raising the hands at certain postures during prayer, rubbing wet hands on the leather socks during

ablution, revelation of the Qur'an in seven modes, and the prohibition of every intoxicant are further examples of verbal mutawatir ahadith.

A hadith ahad or khabar wahid is one which is narrated by people whose number does not reach that of the mutawatir case. Ahad is further classified into mashhur, 'aziz and gharib.

A hadith is termed gharib when a single reporter is found relating it, usually at the beginning of the isnad (i.e., only one Companion relates it from the Prophet). For example, the saying of the Prophet,

"Travel is a part of torment" is gharib; the isnad of this hadith contains only one reporter in each stage: Malik --- Yahya b. Abi Salih --- Abu Huraira --- The Prophet. With regard to its isnad, this hadith is sahih, although most gharib ahadith are weak; Ahmad b. Hanbal said, "Do not write these gharib ahadith because they are munkar and most of them are weak."

A type of hadith similar to gharib is al-afrad (the solitary ones); it is known in three ways:

(i) Similar to gharib, i.e. a single person is found reporting it from a well-known Imam.

(ii) People of one locality are known to narrate a hadith.

(iii) People of one locality are known to report a hadith from the people of another locality, such as Makkan people reporting from Madinan.

If at any stage in the isnads, only two reporters are found to narrate the hadith, it is termed 'aziz. For example, Anas reported that the Messenger of Allah said,

"None of you believes until I become more beloved to him than his own son, his father and all mankind."

Two reporters, Qatada and 'Abdul 'Aziz b. Shu'aib, report this hadith from Anas, and two more reporters narrate from each of them: Shu'ba and Sa'id report from Qatada, and Isma'il b. Ulayya and 'Abd al-Warith from 'Abd al-'Aziz. Then a group of people report from each of them.

A hadith which is reported by more than two reporters is known as mashhur. According to some scholars, every narrative which comes to be known widely, whether or not it has an authentic origin, is called mashhur. A mashhur hadith might be reported by only one or two reporters in the beginnning but become widely-known later, unlike gharib or 'aziz, which are reported by one or two reporters in the beginning and continue to have the same number even in the times of the Successors and those after them. For example, if only one or two reporters are found narrating hadith from a reliable authority in Hadith such as al-Zuhri and Qatada, the hadith will remain either gharib or 'aziz. On the other hand, if a group of people narrate from them it will be then known as mashhur. An example of a mashhur hadith is the famous saying of the Prophet,

"Actions are (judged) according to their intentions."

According to al-'Ala'i (Abu Sa'id Khalil Salah al-Din; d. 761), a hadith may be known as 'aziz and mashhur at the same time. By this he means a hadith which is left with only two reporters in its isnad

at any stage while it enjoys a host of reporters in other stages, such as the saying of the Prophet,

"We are the last but (will be) in the first (rank) on the Day of Resurrection."

This hadith is 'aziz in its first stage, as it is reported by Hudhaifa b. al-Yaman and Abu Huraira only. Later it becomes mashhur as seven people report it from Abu Huraira.

The Classification of Hadeeth - According to the manner in which the hadith is reported

Different ways of reporting, e.g. (he narrated to us),

(he informed us), (I heard), and (on the authority of) are used by the reporters of hadith. The first three usually indicate that the reporter heard in person from his shaikh. The mode can denote either hearing in person or through another reporter.

Tadlis (concealing) refers to an isnad where a reporter may have concealed the identity of his shaikh. Ibn al-Salah describes two types of Tadlis:

a) Tadlis al-Isnad; A person reports from his shaikh, whom he met, what he did not hear from him, or from a contemporary of his whom he did not meet, in such a way as to create the impression that he heard the hadith in person.

A mudallis normally uses the mode or to conceal the truth about the isnad.

b) Tadlis al-Shuyukh: The reporter does mention his shaikh by his usual name, but instead with a less well-known name, by-name, nickname or another less well-known identity, in order not to disclose his shaikh's identity.

Al-'Iraqi (d. 806), in his notes on Muqaddima Ibn al-Salah, adds a third type of Tadlis, known as Tadlis al-Taswiyya. To explain it, let us assume an isnad which contains a trustworthy shaikh reporting from a weak authority, who in turn reports from another trustworthy shaikh. Now, the reporter of this isnad omits the intermediate weak authority, leaving the isnad apparently consisting of reliable authorities. He plainly shows that he heard it from his shaikh but he uses the mode 'an to link his immediate shaikh with the next trustworthy one, thus omitting the intermediate authority. To an average reader, this isnad seems free of any doubt or discrepancy. This is known to have been practised by Baqiyya b. al-Walid, Walid b. Muslim, A'mash and al-Thauri. It is said to be the worst among the three kinds of Tadlis.

Ibn Hajar (d. 852) classifies the mudallisun into five categories in his essay Tabaqat al-Mudallisin:

a) Those who are known to do it occasionally, such as Yahya b. Sa'id al-Ansari.

b) Those who are accepted by the traditionists, either because of their good reputation and relatively

few cases of Tadlis, e.g. al-Thauri, or because they reported from authentic authorities only, e.g.Ibn 'Uyaina.

c) Those who practised it a great deal. The traditionists have accepted only such ahadith from them which were reported with a clear mention of hearing directly. Among these are Abu Zubair al-Makki. Opinions differ regarding whether they are acceptable or not.

d) Similar to the previous category, but the traditionists agree that their ahadith are to be rejected unless they clearly admit of their hearing, such as Baqiyya b. al-Walid.

e) Those who are disparaged due to another reason apart fromTadlis; their ahadith are rejected, even though they admit of hearing them directly. Exempted from them are reporters such as Ibn Lahi'a, whose weakness is found to be of a lesser degree. Ibn Hajar gives the names of 152 such reporters.

Tadlis, especially of those in the last three categories, is so disliked that Shu'ba said, "Tadlis is the brother of lying" and "To commit adultery is more favourable to me than to report by way of Tadlis."

A musalsal (continued) isnad is one in which all the reporters as well as the Prophet use the same mode of transmission such as 'an, haddathana, etc., repeat any other additional statement or remark, or act in a particular manner while narrating the hadith.

Al-Hakim (d. 405) gives eight examples of such asanid, each having a different characteristic repeated feature:

a) use of the phrase sami'tu (I heard);

b) an expression such as "stand and pour water for me so that I may illustrate the way myshaikh performed ablution";

c) haddathana (he narrated to us);

d) an expression such as amarani (he commanded me);

e) an action such as holding one's beard;

f) illustrating by counting on five fingers;

g) an expression such as "I testify that ..."; and

h) interlocking the fingers.

Knowledge of musalsal helps in discounting the possibility of Tadlis.

The Classification of Hadeeth - According to the nature of the

text itself

Shadhdh (aloof) and munkar (rejected)

According to al-Shafi'i, a shaddhh hadith is one which is reported by a trustworthy person but goes against the narration of a person more authentic than him. It does not include a hadith which is unique in its contents and is not narrated by someone else. In the light of this definition, the well-known hadith,

"Actions are (judged) according to intentions", is not considered shadhdh since it has been narrated by Yahya b. Sa'id al-Ansari from Muhammad b. Ibrahim al-Taimi from 'Alqama from 'Umar, all of whom are trustworthy authorities, although each one of them is the only reporter at that stage.

According to Ibn Hajar, if a narration which goes against another authentic hadith is reported by a weak narrator, it is known as munkar.

Traditionists as late as Ahmad used to simply label any hadith of a weak reporter as munkar.

Sometimes, a hadith is labelled as munkar because of its contents being contrary to general sayings of the Prophet. Al-Khatib (d. 463) quotes al-Rabi' b. Khaitham as saying

"Some ahadith have a light like that of a day which is known to us. Some ahadith have darkness like that of night which makes us reject it." He also quotes al-Auza'i as saying, "We used to listen to ahadith and present them to fellow traditionists just as we present forged coins to a money-exchanger: whatever they recognise of them, we accept, and whatever they reject of them, we also reject."

Ibn Kathir quotes the following two ahadith in his Tafsir, the first of which is acceptable, while the second contradicts it and is unreliable:

(i) Ahmad === Abu Mu'awiya === Hisham b. 'Urwa --- Fatima bint al-Mundhir --- Asma' bint Abi Bakr, who said, "My mother came (to Madina) during the treaty Quraish had made, while she was still a polytheist. So I came to the Prophet and said to him, 'O Messenger of Allah, my mother has come willingly: should I treat her with kindness?' He replied, 'Yes! Treat her with kindness'."

(ii) Al-Bazzar === 'Abdullah b. Shabib === Abu Bakr b. Abi Shaiba === Abu Qatada al-'Adawi --- the nephew of al-Zuhri --- al-Zuhri --- 'Urwa --- 'A'isha and Asma', both of whom said, "Our mother came to us in Madina while she was a polytheist, during the peace treaty between the Quraish and the Messenger of Allah. So we said, 'O Messenger of Allah, our mother has come to Madina willingly. Do we treat her kindly?' He said, 'Yes! Treat her kindly'."

Ibn Kathir then remarks:

"This (latter) hadith, to our knowledge is reported only through this route of al-Zuhri --- 'Urwa --- 'A'isha. It is a munkar hadith with this text because the mother of 'A'isha is Umm Ruman, who was

already a Muslim emigrant, while the mother of Asma' was another woman as mentioned by name in other ahadith."

In contrast to a munkar hadith, if a reliable reporter is found to add something which is not narrated by other authentic sources, his addition is normally accepted as long as it does not contradict them; such an addition is known as ziyada thiqa (an addition by one trustworthy).

An addition by a Companion to the saying of the Prophet is termed mudraj (added). For example, al-Khatib relates via Abu Qattan and Shababa --- Shu'ba --- Muhammad b. Ziyad --- Abu Huraira --- The Prophet, who said,

"Perform the ablution fully; woe to the heels from the Fire!"

Al-Khatib then remarks,

"The statement, 'Perform the ablution fully' is made by Abu Huraira, while the statement afterwards, 'Woe to the heels from the Fire!', is that of the Prophet. The distinction between the two is understood from the narration of al-Bukhari, who transmits the same hadith and quotes Abu Huraira as saying, "Complete the ablution, for Abul Qasim said, 'Woe to the heels from the Fire!'."

Such an addition may be found in the beginning, in the middle, or at the end, in explanation of a term used. Idraj (addition) is mostly found in the text, although a few examples show that such additions are found in the isnad as well, where the reporter grafts a part of one isnad to another.

A reporter found to be in the habit of intentional idraj is generally unacceptable and considered a liar. However, the traditionists are more lenient towards such reporters who may do so forgetfully or in order to explain a difficult word.

The Classification of Hadeeth - According to a hidden defect found in the isnad or text of a hadith

Before discussing ma'lul (defective) ahadith, a brief note on mudtarib (shaky) and maqlub (reversed) ahadith would help in understanding ma'lul.

According to Ibn Kathir, if reporters disagree about a particular shaikh, about some other points in the isnad or about the text in such a way that none of the opinions can be preferred over another, such a hadith is called mudtarib.

For example with regard to idtirab in the isnad, it is reported on the authority of Abu Bakr that he said: "O Messenger of Allah! I see you getting older?" He replied, "What made me old are Sura Hud and its sister suras."

Al-Daraqutni says,

"This is an example of a mudtarib hadith. It is reported through Abu Ishaq, but as many as ten different opinions are held about this isnad; some report it as mursal, others as muttasil; some take it as musnad of Abu Bakr, others as musnad of Sa'd or 'A'isha. Since all these reports are reliable, it is difficult to prefer one to the other: hence, the hadith is termed as mudtarib."

As an example of idtirab in the text, Rafi' b. Khadij that the Messenger of Allah forbade the renting of land. The reporters narrating from Rafi' give different statements as follows:

(i) Hanzala asked Rafi', "What about renting on gold and silver?" He replied, "It does not matter if it is lent on gold and silver."

(ii) Rifa'a --- Rafi' --- the Prophet, who said, "Whoever owns a piece of land should cultivate it, give it to his brother to cultivate, or abandon it.

(iii) Salim --- Rafi' --- his two uncles --- the Prophet, who forbade the renting of farming land.

(iv) The son of Rafi' --- Rafi' --- the Prophet, who forbade the renting of Iand.

(v) A different narration by Rafi' from the Prophet, who said, "Whoever owns a piece of land should either cultivate it or give it to his brother to cultivate. He must not rent it on a third or fourth part (of the produce) or on a given quantity of the produce."

(vi) Zaid b. Thabit said, "May Allah forgive Rafi'! I am more aware of the hadith than he; what happened was that two Helpers had a dispute, so they came to the Prophet, who (after listening to their cases) said, 'If this is your position, then do not rent the farms.' Rafi' has just heard the last phrase, i.e., 'Do not rent the farms'."

Because of these various versions, Ahmad says,

"The ahadith reported by Rafi' about the renting of land are mudtarib. They are not to be accepted, especially when they go against the well-established hadith of Ibn 'Umar that the Messenger of Allah gave the land of Khaibar to the Jews on condition that they work on it and take half of the produce."

Maqlub (reversed) ahadith

A hadith is known as maqlub when its isnad is grafted to a different text or vice versa, or if a reporter happens to reverse the order of phrases in a sentence in the text.

As an example relating to text, Muslim, in his transmission of the famous hadith describing the seven who will be under the shelter of Allah on the Day of Judgment, quotes one of the categories as, "A man who conceals his act of charity to an extent that his right hand does not know what his left hand gives in charity." This sentence has clearly been reversed by a reporter, because the correct wording is recorded in other narrations of both al-Bukhari and Muslim as follows, "... that his left hand does not know what his right hand gives in charity."

The famous trial of al-Bukhari by the scholars of Baghdad provides a good example of a maqlub isnad. The traditionists, in order to test their visitor, al-Bukhari, appointed ten men, each with ten

ahadith. Now, each hadith of these ten was grafted with the isnad of another. Imam al-Bukhari listened to each of the ten men and denied the authenticity of every hadith. When they had finished narrating these ahadith, al-Bukhari turned to each person inturn and recounted to him each hadith with its correct isnad. This trial won him great honour among the scholars of Baghdad.

Other ways of rendering a hadith maqlub are by replacing the name of a reporter with another, e.g. quoting Abu Huraira as the reporter from the Prophet although the actual reporter is someone else, or by reversing the name of the reporter, e.g. mentioning Walid b. Muslim instead of Muslim b. Walid, or Ka'b b. Murra instead of Murra b. Ka'b.

Ma'lul or Mu'allal (defective) hadith

Ibn al-Salah says, "A ma'lul hadith is one which appears to be sound, but thorough research reveals a disparaging factor." Such factors can be:

(i) declaring a hadith musnad when it is in fact mursal, or marfu' when it is in fact mauquf; and

(ii) showing a reporter to narrate from his shaikh when in fact he did not meet the latter; or attributing a hadith to one Companion when it in fact comes through another.

Ibn al-Madini (d. 324) says that such a defect can only be revealed if all the asanid of a particular hadith are collated. In his book al-'Ilal, he gives thirty-four Successors and the names of those Companions from whom each of them heard directly. For example, he says that al-Hasan al-Basri did not see 'Ali, although he adds there is a slight possibility that he may have seen him during his childhood in Madina. Such information is very important since many Sufi traditions go back to al-Hasan al-Basri, who is claimed to report directly from 'Ali.

Being a very delicate branch of Mustalah al-Hadith, only a few well-known traditionists such as Ibn al-Madini (d. 234), Ibn Abi Hatim al-Razi (d. 327), al-Khallal (d. 311) and al-Daraqutni (d. 385), have compiled books about it. Ibn Abi Hatim has given 2840 examples of ma'lul ahadith related to different issues in his Kitab al-'Ilal.

An example of a ma'lul hadith is one transmitted by Muslim on the authority of Abu Huraira, who reports the Prophet as saying

"Allah created Land on Saturday, the Mountain on Monday, despised things on Tuesday, Light on Wednesday, scattered the cattle in it (the earth) on Thursday, and created Adam on Friday."

About it, Ibn Taimiyya says,

"Men more knowledgeable than Muslim, such as al-Bukhari and Yahya b. Ma'in, have criticised it. Al-Bukhari said, 'This saying is not that of the Prophet, but one of Ka'b al-Ahbar'."

The Classification of Hadeeth - According to the reliability and

memory of the reporters

Under this classification falls the final verdict on a hadith, being one of the following: sahih, hasan, da'if or maudu'.

Among the early traditionists, mostly of the first two centuries, ahadith were classified into two categories only: sahih and da'if; al-Tirmidhi was to be the first to distinguish hasan from da'if. This is why traditionists and jurists such as Ahmad, who seemed to argue on the basis of da'if ahadith sometimes, were in fact basing their argument on the ahadith which were later to be known as hasan.

We now examine in more detail these four important classes of ahadith.

Saheeh (sound)

Hasan (agreeable)

Da'eef (weak)

Maudoo' (fabricated)

Saheeh (sound)

Al-Shafi'i states the following requirement in order for a hadith which is not mutawatir to be acceptable:

"Each reporter should be trustworthy in his religion; he should be known to be truthful in his narrating, to understand what he narrates, to know how a different expression can alter the meaning, and report the wording of the hadith verbatim, not only its meaning. This is because if he does not know how a different expression can change the whole meaning, he will not know if he has changed what is lawful into what is prohibited. Hence, if he reports the hadith according to its wording, no change of meaning is found at all. Moreover, he should be a good memoriser if he happens to report from his memory, or a good preserver of his book if he happens to report from it. He should agree with the narrations of the huffaz, if he reports something which they also do. He should not be a mudallis, who narrates from someone he met something he did not hear, nor should he report from the Prophet contrary to what reliable sources have reported from him. In addition, the one who is above him (in the isnad) should be of the same quality until the hadith goes back uninterrupted to the Prophet or any authority below him."

Ibn al-Salah, however, defines a sahih hadith more precisely by saying:

"A sahih hadith is the one which has a continuous isnad, made up of reporters of trustworthy preservers from similar authorities, and which is found to be clear from shudhudh and any defects."

By the above definition, no room is left for any weak hadith, whether, for example, it is munqati', mu'dal, mudtarib, maqlub, shadhdh, munkar, ma'lul, or contains a mudallis. The definition also

excludes hasan ahadith, as will be shown under that heading.

Of all the collectors of hadith, al-Bukhari and Muslim were greatly admired because of their tireless attempt to collect sahih hadith only. It is generally understood that the more trustworthy and of good memory the reporters, the more authentic the hadith. The isnad: al-Shafi'i --- Malik --- Nafi' --- 'Abdullah b. 'Umar --- The Prophet, is called a "golden isnad" because of its renowned reporters.

Some traditionists prefer Sahih al-Bukhari to Sahih Muslim because al-Bukhari always looked for those reporters who have either accompanied or met each other, even if only once in their lifetime. On the other hand, Muslim would accept a reporter who is simply found to be contemporary to his immediate authority in reporting.

The following grading is given for sahih ahadith only:

- those which are transmitted by both al-Bukhari and Muslim;
- those which are transmitted by al-Bukhari only;
- those which are transmitted by Muslim only;
- those which agree with the requirements of both al-Bukhari and Muslim but are not found in their collections;
- those which agree with the requirements of al-Bukhari only;
- those which agree with the requirements of Muslim only; and
- those declared sahih by other traditionists.

Hasan (agreeable)

Al-Tirmidhi means by hadith hasan, a hadith which is not shadhdh, which does not contain a disparaged reporter in its isnad, and which is reported through more than one route of narration.

Al-Khattabi (d. 388) states a very concise definition,

"It is the one where its source is known and its reporters are prominent."

By this he means that the hadith should not be of an ambiguous nature like the mursal or munqati' hadith, or one containing a mudallis.

Ibn al-Salah classifies hasan into two categories:

(i) one with an isnad containing a reporter who is mastur (i.e., no prominent person reported from him) but is not totally careless in his reporting, provided that a similar text is reported through another isnad as well;

(ii) one with an isnad containing a reporter who is known to be truthful and reliable, but is a degree less in his preservation of hadith in comparison to the reporters of sahih ahadith.

In both categories, Ibn al-Salah requires that the hadith be free of any shudhudh.

Al-Dhahabi, after giving the various definitions, says, "A hasan hadith is one which excels the da'if but nevertheless does not reach the standard of a sahih hadith." In the light of this definition, the following isnads are hasan according to al-Dhahabi:

(i) Bahz b. Hakam --- his father --- his grandfather;

(ii) 'Amr b. Shu'aib --- his father --- his grandfather;

(iii) Muhammad b. 'Amr --- Abu Salama --- Abu Huraira.

Reporters such as al-Harith b. 'Abdullah, 'Asim b. Damura, Hajjaj b. Artat, Khusaif b. 'Abd al-Rahman and Darraj Abu al-Samh attract different verdicts: some traditionists declare their ahadith hasan, others declare them da'if.

According to the definition of al-Tirmidhi and Ibn al-Salah, a number of weak ahadith on a particular issue can be raised to the degree of hasan if the weakness found in their reporters is of a mild nature. However, in case the weakness is severe, (i.e., the reporter is a liar or the hadith is itself shadhdh), such weak ahadith will not support each other and will remain weak. For example, the famous hadith,

"He who preserves forty hadiths for my Ummah will be raised by Allah on the Day of Resurrection among the Fuqaha' ", has been declared to be da'if by most of the traditionists, although it is reported through various routes.

Da'eef (weak)

A hadith which fails to reach the status of hasan is da'if. Usually, the weakness is one of discontinuity in the isnad, in which case the hadith could be mursal, mu'allaq, mudallas, munqati' or mu'dal, according to the precise nature of the discontinuity, or one of a reporter having a disparaged character, such as due to his telling lies, excessive mistakes, opposition to the narration of more reliable sources, involvement in innovation, and ambiguity surrounding his own person.

The smaller the number and importance of defects, the less severe the weakness. The more the defects in number and severity, the closer the hadith will be to being fabricated.

Some ahadith, according to the variation in the nature of the weakness associated with its reporters, rank at the bottom of the hasan grade or the top of the da'if grade. Reporters such as 'Abdullah b. Lahi'a, 'Abd al-Rahman b. Zaid b. Aslam, Abu Bakr b. Abi Maryam al-Himsi, Faraj b. Fadala, Rishdin b. Sa'd and the like, attract such types of varying ranks as they are neither extremely good preservers nor totally abandoned.

Maudoo' (fabricated)

Al-Dhahabi defines it as a hadith, the text of which goes against the established norms or its reporters include a liar, e.g. the forty ahadith known as Wad'aniyya or the copy of 'Ali al-Rida which was fabricated against him.

A number of traditionists have collected fabricated ahadith separately in order to distinguish them from other ahadith; among them are Ibn al-Jauzi in al-Maudu'at, al-Janzaqani in Kitab al-Abatil, and al-Suyuti in al-La'ali al-Masnu'a fi al-Ahadith al-Maudu'a.

Some of these ahadith were known to be spurious by the confession of their inventors. For example, Muhammad b. Sa'id al-Maslub used to say, "It is not wrong to fabricate an isnad for a sound statement." Another notorious inventor, 'Abd al-Karim Abu al-Auja, who was killed and crucified by Muhammad b. Sulaiman b. 'Ali, governor of Basra, admitted that he had fabricated four thousand ahadith declaring lawful the prohibited and vice-versa.

Maudu' ahadith are also recognised by external evidence related to a discrepancy found in the dates or times of a particular incident. For example, when the second caliph, 'Umar b. al-Khattab wanted to expel the Jews from Khaibar, some Jewish dignitaries brought a document to 'Umar apparently proving that the Prophet had intended that they stay there by exempting them from jizya. The document carried the witness of Sa'd b. Mu'adh and Mu'awiyah b. Abi Sufyan. 'Umar rejected the document outright, knowing that it was fabricated because the conquest of Khaibar took place in 6 AH, whereas Sa'd b. Mu'adh died in 3 AH just after the Battle of the Trench, and Mu'awiyah embraced Islam in 8 AH, after the conquest of Makkah.

The author, in his thesis, Criticism of Hadith among Muslims with reference to Sunan Ibn Maja, has given more examples of fabricated ahadith under the following eight categories of causes of fabrication:

- political differences;
- factions based on issues of creed;
- fabrications by zanadiqa;
- fabrications by story-tellers;
- fabrications by ignorant ascetics;

- prejudice in favour of town, race or a particular imam;
- inventions for personal motives;
- proverbs turned into ahadith.

Further Branches of Mustalah and Rijal-al-Hadeeth

The above-mentioned classification of ahadith plays a vital role in ascertaining the authenticity of a particular narration. Ibn al-Salah mentions sixty-five terms in his book, of which twenty-three have been discussed above. Two further types not included by Ibn al-Salah, mu'allaq and mutawatir, have been dealt with from other sources. The remaining forty-two types follow in brief, which help further distinguish between different types of narrations.

1) The knowledge of i'tibar, mutaba'a and shahid. Traditionists are always in search of more witnesses in favour of a hadith which is reported by one source only; such research is termedi'tibar. If a supporting narration is not found for a particularhadith, it is declared as fard mutlaq (absolutely singular) or gharib. For example, if a hadith is reported through the following isnad: Hammad b. Salama --- Ayyub --- Ibn Sirin --- Abu Huraira --- The Prophet, research would be done to ascertain whether another trustworthy reporter has narrated it fromAyyub; if so, it will be called mutaba'a tamma (complete mutaba'a); if not, a reporter other thanAyyub narrating from Ibn Sirin would be sought: if so, it will be called mutaba'a qasira (incomplete mutaba'a).

2) Afrad (singular narrations).

3) The type of character required in an acceptable reporter.

4) The way a hadith is heard and the different ways of acquiring ahadith.

5) How a hadith is written and how punctuation marks are used.

6) The way a hadith is reported.

7) The manners required in traditionists.

8) The manners required for a student of hadith.

9) The knowledge of a higher or lower isnad (i.e. one with less or more reporters respectively).

10) The knowledge of difficult words.

11) The knowledge of abrogated ahadith.

12) The knowledge of altered words in a text or isnad.

13) The knowledge of contradictory ahadith.

14) The knowledge of an addition made to an isnad (i.e. by an inserting the name of an additional reporter).

15) The knowledge of a well-concealed type of mursal.

16) The knowledge of the Companions.

17) The knowledge of the Successors.

18) The knowledge of elders reporting from younger reporters.

19) The knowledge of reporters similar in age reporting from each other.

20) The knowledge of brothers and sisters among reporters.

21) Knowledge of fathers reporting from their sons.

22) Knowledge of sons reporting from their fathers.

23) Knowledge of such reporters reporting from one authority, one in his early life and the other in his old age. In such cases the dates of death of the two reporters will be of significance.

24) Knowledge of such authorities from whom only one person reported.

25) Knowledge of such reporters who are known by a number of names and titles.

26) Knowledge of unique names among the Companions and the reporters in general.

27) Knowledge of names and by-names (kunya).

28) The knowledge of by-names for reporters known by their names only.

29) The knowledge of nicknames (alqab) of the traditionists.

30) Knowledge of mu'talif and mukhtalif (names written similarly but pronounced differently, e.g. Kuraiz and Kariz.

31) The knowledge of muttafiq and muftariq (similar names but different identities), e.g. "Hanafi": there are two reporters with this name; one is called by this name because of his tribe Banu Hanifa; the other because of his adherence to a particular madh-hab.

32) Names covering both previous types.

33) Names looking similar but they differ because of the difference in their father's names, e.g. Yazid

b. al-Aswad and al-Aswad b. Yazid.

34) Names attributed to other than their fathers, e.g. Isma'il b. Umayya; in this case Umayya is the mother's name.

35) Knowledge of such relations (attributed to a place or tribe, etc.) which have a meaning different from what they seem to be apparently, e.g. Abu Mas'ud al-Badri, who is known as al-Badri not because he witnessed the battle of Badr but because he came to live there.

36) The knowledge of ambiguous reporters by finding out their names.

37) The knowledge of the dates of birth and death of reporters.

38) The knowledge of trustworthy and weak reporters.

39) Knowledge of such trustworthy reporters who are found to be confused in their old age.

40) Knowledge of contemporaries in a certain period.

41) The knowledge of free slaves (mawali) among the reporters.

42) The knowledge of the homelands and home towns of reporters.